



Lucille Thomas

Oral History Transcription

Aug. 10, 2004

Interviewed by:	David Healey
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Transcribed by:	Howard Dukes, Staff, Civil Rights Heritage Center
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Summary:	Lucille Thomas is a lifelong South Bend resident and graduate of Central High School who in 1956 became the first African American to work in a downtown store, NuMode Hosiery. She was promoted to manager in 1966.

0:00:00 [David Healey]: Today is August 10, 2004. I'm David Healey. I'm doing an interview today with Ms. Lucille Thomas. We're doing the interview at the A.M.E...

[Lucille Thomas]: Olivet A.M.E. Church...

[DH]: Excuse me, Olivet A.M.E. Church in South Bend, Indiana, and we're going to be talking with Ms. Thomas today about her remembrances of South Bend. Now, did you grow up here in South Bend?

[LT]: I did. I was born and raised in South Bend.

[DH]: Did your parents... were they... did they come here from somewhere else or were they already...

[LT]: No. They did come from the south.

[DH]: Do you remember where?

[LT]: Oh dear, my father came from Georgia. I guess the Atlanta area. My mother from the Mississippi area.

0:00:52 [DH]: Do you remember what year they came to South Bend?

[LT]: Oh, I have no idea.

[DH]: Where did your father work at?

[LT]: Studebaker's.

[DH]: And your mother? Did she work outside the home?

[LT]: No, she did not.

[DH]: Did she take in cleaning and things like that to help the family?

[LT]: No.

[DH]: So, she was an at home mother.

[LT]: Right. There were six of us, so, she had her hands full.

[DH]: I guess so. Six brothers and sisters.

[LT]: Right.

[DH]: And you were in the middle or...

[LT]: The youngest.

0:01:19 [DH]: The youngest of six. I was the youngest in my family, too. It's a great, great place to be. Well, all my brothers and sisters are much older than me.

So, you grew up here in South Bend. Your mother stayed at home and took care of the children. What do you remember about your childhood? Did your parents ever talk to you about being African American? Did they ever mention anything to you about that?

[LT]: Not that I can recall, really.

[DH]: Did your parents like South Bend?

[LT]: They seemed to. They seem... I don't know what brought them here, but they seemed to like it. They seemed to enjoy it.

0:02:03 [DH]: Your early years where did you grow up at? Where was your home?

[DH]: Okay, I was born on Taylor Street. None of us was born in the hospital. We were born at home. We lived at 523 South Taylor Street, and I was there until about... oh goodness. I can't remember how old I was when we moved from there to the west side on Parallel Street. So those are my childhood years.

[DH]: Where did you go to school at?

[LT]: Oh, several. I went to kindergarten at Oliver school, then after that I went to elementary school at Elder. Elder had a —totally destroyed. Then I went to Franklin, oh, until about... oh my goodness. About maybe eight, ten or so? I can't remember. And then we moved to the west side and then I went to Linden until... through the eighth grade. And then after Linden of course then to high school and then I went to Central.

0:03:15 [DH]: Central had like a junior high attached to it.

[LT]: They did have yeah, a junior building right.

[DH]: And so, you lived... went to several different schools.

[LT]: Right.

[DH]: And when you went to Linden School, what did you do for fun as a young girl here in South Bend?

[LT]: Oh, my goodness. I can't think back that's a long time ago. Oh, my goodness let's see, what did we do back in those days? Just mostly like movies, we were kind of young to go to dances and things. And of course, a lot of church involvement. Which was probably the biggest thing for any of us. What else did we do?

[DH]: Did you go on Birdsell Street? Did you go to Uncle Bill's?

[LT]: I never went to Uncle Bill's. I heard of it, but I never did. I didn't do a lot of going to places like that because of finances. With all of us we just didn't have the funds to go to a lot of places.

0:04:21 [DH]: What about Hering House?

[LT]: Oh definitely. But we went there mainly in our high school years. Although when I was younger, they did have vacation bible school there. We went to that coming up at Hering House as well as at our church. Let me think, what else...

[DH]: Did you take part in any of the plays at H.T. Burleigh theater?

[LT]: Oh yes, but I got into Burleigh in my teenaged years

[DH]: Ok, then we'll fast forward to teenaged years. So, you're a teenager now, and you're going to Hering House and they had a lot of activities there...

[LT]: They had a lot of social... social events there. And a lot of things for kids to do. Go there... Like I said, bible school. They had dances for teenagers on Friday nights. They had plays, and of course that's where the Burleigh Association... That's where they always rehearsed mainly. At the Hering House.

0:05:21 [DH]: So, you must have known B.G. Smith by chance?

[LT]: No.

[DH]: You didn't?

[LT]: I know the name but, I don't know the person.

[DH]: ...Mrs. Curtis?

[LT]: Of course.

[DH]: Josephine Curtis.

[LT]: Right.

[DH]: So, you did do some plays there you must have done them with Charles Orgain.

[LT]: Right, he was in some of the functions... 'right. Let's see... We did arts and crafts and just different things there were a lot of things to do.

[DH]: Your parents must have been very comfortable with you going to the Hering House.

[LT]: Definitely, definitely.

[DH]: Of course, there were a few boys at the Hering House too.

[LT]: Right, but I think they knew how far I would go.

[DH]: Okay.

[LT]: Trustworthy.

0:06:14 [DH]: Trustworthy. So, you didn't go to the Birdsell Street like Uncle Bill's or anything like that but you went to the Hering House.

[LT]: I went to Linden School. Linden School was right there in the Birdsell Street area. Wasn't that much to do on Birdsell Street. I'm trying to think...

[DH]: You were at Central in what, the 19... late '40s...

[LT]: No. no.

[DH]: The '50s.

[LT]: In the '50s.

[DH]: '50s. Uncle Bill's was pretty much gone by the 1950s.

[LT]: Probably.

0:06:53 [DH]: So, you're at Central and of course you were getting ready to...thinking about graduation and moving on in your life. What were the counselors like at Central for you? Did they encourage you to further education?

[LT]: I had one counselor almost my entire time. His name was Herman Judd. And he was also my homeroom teacher, and... Thinking back, I cannot remember a lot of encouragement to go to college, but myself, I never really thought much about going to college because... I guess college just didn't appeal to me at the time. I didn't feel that I was college material. Not because I was discouraged. It was just my own feeling. I did go to IUSB for a year, but that was it.

0:07:53 [DH]: Okay. So, what were you planning to do when you graduated?

[LT]: I liked secretarial work. I really loved typing and all that kind of stuff.

[DH]: Did you take those courses at Central?

[LT]: I did. I did. That's not what I did when I first got out of school though, but that's what I wanted to do.

[DH]: So, when did you graduate from Central?

[LT]: When?

[DH]: When?

[LT]: '55.

[DH]: Ok that was the year after they won the state championship in '54.

[LT]: '53 I think.

[DH]: '53?

[LT]: '53. That's when they won.

[DH]: Must have been exciting times.

[LT]: Oh, definitely. Definitely. We were very excited.

0:08:29 [DH]: So, what did you do when you graduated?

[LT]: Went into retail.

[DH]: Is that when you went downtown?

[LT]: Right. That's the first... Okay, I graduated in '55 and I did go to IUSB for a year, but I didn't do much—and I didn't start working downtown until about '57.

[DH]: Did you have any part time jobs as a young lady?

[LT]: What did I do between '55 and '57? Oh dear.

0:09:00 [DH]: Well, it doesn't matter. So, you're about 19-20 years old, and you went downtown to apply for a job. And this where you went to NuMode?

[LT]: NuMode Hosiery Shop. Right.

[DH]: I was reading in your little paper that you put together for the *South Bend Tribune* that you went down there...

[LT]: Oh, my goodness. I remember that.

[DH]: Oh, I have a file on you. You went down to the NuMode...

[LT]: Right.

[DH]: A 20-year-old young lady. African American. Weren't too many African Americans working down there.

[LT]: Exactly.

[DH]: And you went down, and you mentioned here that you just filled out the application and didn't think much of it.

[LT]: In fact, a friend of mine told me... I don't even know how she found out that they were looking for someone. They needed someone to work there. So, I applied.

0:09:58 [DH]: And it just wasn't any... Do you think that you were making... breaking new ground, or...

[LT]: At that time, I didn't right away. I didn't. But, evidently, I did.

[DH]: And they called you and you got the job.

[LT]: Got the job. Mostly doing some stock work, and then... They had a children's department. They sold children's clothes as well as lady's hosiery and men's socks and stuff. And then I was... I did sales for the children's department.

[DH]: So, they started you out there in the children's department.

[LT]: Right.

0:10:37 [DH]: In this time frame there were very few African American women working downtown.

[LT]: Very few.

[DH]: Eugenia Braboy was...

[LT]: Right.

[DH]: Running an elevator there.

[LT]: Exactly.

[DH]: And yourself.

[LT]: Right.

[DH]: And that's about it isn't it?

[LT]: There were a couple of ladies that worked at a store called Benton's—a ladies' apparel shop.

[DH]: Benton's

[LT]: B-E-N-T-O-N-S

[DH]: Ladies apparel.

[LT]: Right.

0:11:07 [DH]: And this... Did they work as sales clerks at Benton's?

[LT]: At that time one, I think, was doing stock and one was running the elevator. I believe.

[DH]: So, they weren't dealing with the public?

[LT]: Not that much.

[DH]: Well it was you and Mrs. Braboy who actually...

[LT]: I can't think of who else worked down there in the downtown area. I have a brother who is an artist. He worked at Robertson's.

[DH]: You mentioned him... And he worked on store displays...

[LT]: Right.

[DH]: And that type of thing.

[LT]: Right.

0:11:46 [DH]: Robertson was very open to...

[LT]: Yes, they were. They... I think the most the most open department store downtown at that time.

[DH]: What about the Milady shop, or Ellsworth's, or...

[LT]: I was telling John Charles Bryant. I remember a store called Ellsworth's, but I don't remember much about it. I think because I probably didn't shop there, but I do remember there was a store called Ellsworth's. I do remember that.

[DH]: Now you mentioned that you didn't shop there. Did you not shop there because...

[LT]: I'm trying to think why... I'm thinking it's probably because it was a store that was a little bit too expensive for my pocketbook at the time. So that's... but I don't remember a whole lot about the store. I remember a lot about Robertson's because that's where most of us shopped.

0:12:35 [DH]: I talked... Mrs. Brandy mentioned that her father had a charge card at Robertson's, so they must have been quite...

[LT]: I had one at one time.

[DH]: Open to...

[LT]: My sisters, they all had... I think everybody had a charge card at Robertson's whether you were African American or whomever. Everybody I think in South Bend at one time had a charge card at Robertson's.

[DH]: Yes, I had a charge card at Robertson's. You're right. Just about everybody had one.

0:13:05 So, getting back to you. You're 19, 20 years old, you're working at NuMode and you... you must have been quite a rarity.

[LT]: Oh definitely. Oh, definitely a rarity. I had no problem in sales with the children's wear. And, as you can see in this article, they had me doing children ware because, in those days, people got personal service. And when you would sell ladies hosiery you put your hand in to see how it looked. They thought I couldn't do that because my hands are going to look different than theirs. That's very true. And so, I worked with the children's apparel mostly.

And then, when they opened Town and Country Shopping Center, the manager that was downtown at the NuMode Store moved to that store and another manager was appointed, and I was her assistant... promoted to her assistant, and she had me do everything. I sold hosiery and everything. So, if someone came in... as a Caucasian person came in and wanted to see hose they were stunned if I waited on them. Some of them, they were fine with it. Some of them weren't. They would just ask for someone else.

0:14:29 [DH] Well, you mentioned here that African American women wore hose too. Did they come in and shop?

[LT]: They did. After they knew I was there they did come. After people realized I was there, yes, they did. I see people on the street today.

[Recording is interrupted]

[DH]: Where were we...

[LT]: But after... after African American people knew I worked there, yes they did. They did get a lot more business.

[DH]: So, you increased business for the company.

[LT]: I think I did. I think I did.

0:15:01 [DH]: Well where did African Americans buy hosiery before?

[LT]: Probably at department stores like Robertson's. Places like that.

[DH]: So, there was a big change in business for the company after you were...

[LT]: I think... I think it was a good change. A good change.

[DH]: What did your supervisor say? Did they say anything about hiring you as being a bold move for them, or they just like...

[LT]: Never did.

[DH]: Never did just...

[LT]: And I guess the biggest... What can I say? What am I trying to say? People noticed things more so because after the Town and Country store, that lady moved out there. Then the one promoted to manager—she moved and then they moved me up to management. And that was indeed a rarity. To manage a store.

[DH]: That was in the 1960s. '66 I think.

[LT]: I can't remember.

[DH]: It says in '66 the manager moved to city and I was promoted to manager.

[LT]: Right.

0:16:11 [DH]: So, you were hired in '56 or '57?

[LT]: '57.

[DH]: '57 and by 1966 you're manager.

[LT]: Right.

[DH]: So, nine years.

[LT]: Right. And to my knowledge I was the first African American store manager in downtown—as far as I know. Now if someone else knows something different, but to my knowledge I was the first.

[DH]: I believe you're right. I have not run across anyone...

[LT]: And of course, and then they had... I think they still do occasionally, they had a section in the *Tribune*... They had a section called "Business Briefs," and so I had my little picture in there and a little article. Not that I was the first African American, but just that I had been promoted to the store manager.

[DH]: That was 1966.

[LT]: And I'm sure there's... I don't know if the *Tribune* still has stuff from that far back.

[DH]: Oh yes.

[LT]: So, they might have a picture and an article there. I don't know.

[DH]: You remember... you probably don't remember don't remember what month that was or anything. I can find it, but I would have to go through all the issues of 1966.

0:17:07 Okay, so you're working downtown South Bend. Where did you go for lunch? What did you do on your breaks?

[LT]: Okay, I ate lunch downtown. Places like Woolworth's and Kresge. Robertson's had a mezzanine at the time. Went there quite a bit.

[Recording is interrupted]

[DH]: Go ahead.

[LT]: Approached them or wait on them. There are definitely some people who did not want me to wait on them. So it might have caused problems for some stores.

[DH]: So, you see that... do you attribute that to the civil rights movement? That change in... in...

[LT]: I'm sure it helped. I'm sure it helped.

0:18:06 [DH]: Did you ever go to the business districts on Birdsell Street or Chapin Street?

[LT]: Very rarely. I really didn't know much about what there was on Birdsell Street. As far as Chapin Street goes maybe we'd go out to a couple of restaurants or something, but... I just wasn't a goer out very much. To coin a word. I just didn't go out that much to places.

[DH]: So basically, you worked, you pursued your career, you went out occasionally for movies and things like that...

[LT]: And every now and then folks would get together and go to a club or something, but not a whole lot.

[DH]: Were there any clubs you liked better than others?

[LT]: Oh, I'd have to think... what did we have back in those days?

[DH]: Didn't they have the Trianon lounge?

[LT]: I never went there.

[DH]: The Palais Royale?

[LT]: Now I was one of those persons that... I really didn't go out until I hit 21. To me a cheap date, 21, meant I could go out. I could have a drink—legally. Okay.

[DH]: I waited 'til 21, too.

[LT]: A lot of my friends were sneaking in, of course. But what I liked... but what I did was when I... I thought oh, when I reach the age of 21 I can go to the Palais Royale to a breakfast dance.

0:19:35 [DH]: What was a breakfast dance?

[LT]: They had dance where you could go and you just danced all night. And my sisters used to go. And I thought oh, when I get 21 I'm gonna do

that. I turned 21 and the Palais Royale closed, so I never got to go. My first time in the Palais Royale was when they redid it recently and they had the open house. So, I never got to go, but I looked forward to things. I was at home when I was 21, and that's when I started going out.

0:20:01 [DH]: Did you ever become involved in any politics?

[LT]: No. I'm not a political person, no.

[DH]: Did you know J. Chester Allen?

[LT]: I knew him. I knew his wife. I knew his children...

[DH]: But you never delved into politics.

[LT]: No. there was a... We had a church member who at one time was running for something. Connie Green. She ran for something— Councilman or something. And I was between jobs at the time, and her mother told her to call me and see if I would be her secretary. She said I will pay you, and I said no. "I need a secretary." I said I'm not a political person and I will not do politics. No.

[DH]: So, you're independent.

[LT]: I guess. But no... I worked downtown at circuit court and I worked first in the clerk's office... Circuit court clerk's office, and that was very political at the time. You had to know somebody, and I just got hired and I didn't have to do anything. They had a lot of political functions and I refused to go and I said if I lose the job, I lose the job. I never had any problems.

0:21:14 [DH]: What about friends? Did you have... did you know... let's see, I'm trying to think of the African American police officers at the time. Did you know any of them?

[LT]: I know Paul Harvey.

[DH]: Oh yes.

[LT]: Al Pope. Did you know him?

[DH]: No, he passed away before we could schedule an interview. I heard that he was quite...

[LT]: Ralph Mullens. We used to call him "Moon."

[DH]: "Moon" Mullens.

[LT]: Ralph Mullens yeah.

[DH]: They walked that beat down there.

[LT]: Oh yes, they did. Yes, they did. I'm trying to think of some other policemen. African American policeman.

[DH]: Jerome Perkins.

[LT]: Jerome Perkins.

[DH]: Spamward Mitchem.

[LT]: Oh yeah, I forgot about him. Right. Spam Mitchem.

[DH]: They all walked that same... started out walking that same beat.

[LT]: Right.

[DH]: So, you knew those... those names.

[LT]: I knew some better than... I knew Ralph Mullens. Mr. Pope was older but I knew who he was... I knew who Spam Mitchem was and Mr. Perkins. Paul Harvey is not a whole lot older than I, so I knew him. We went to the same high school, or whatever.

[DH]: He was a great basketball player.

[LT]: Yes, indeed he was. Indeed, he was.

0:22:26 [DH]: Did you do any extra-curricular activities at Central?

[LT]: I was in glee club.

[DH]: Glee club.

[LT]: What else did I do?

[DH]: Choir, maybe?

[LT]: Just the glee club. I wasn't in a whole lot.

0:22:50 [DH]: So, politics was out. You did know the police officers. What about... where did your sisters... what did they do?

[LT]: Okay.

[DH]: Did they go on to further education, or...

[LT]: None of us went to college, except for maybe... and then it wasn't called IUSB then. It was called Indiana University extension. That's what it was called. And we all may have took a class or two here or there.

My one sister Juanita, she was in the military for a couple of years. And my sister Evelyn, she worked at a restaurant called ABC Buffet restaurant. It was out on West Sample Street. She worked there for a number of years. My sister Ethel Mae, she got married, and my brothers... Dave, he like... he was an artist but he never went to school. Like I said, he did a lot of the display work at Robertson's. My brother Russell, he was in the military and... He worked. That's pretty much all I can think of right now.

0:24:06 [DH]: Okay. So, your life was, as you read Barbara Brandy's and some other people's interviews, your life was quite a bit different.

[LT]: Yeah...

[DH]: What do you attribute that to?

[LT]: I don't know.

[DH]: Did you just... went down there to NuMode's, put the application in...

[LT]: I didn't have a problem. I went down and left... filled out the application, and I don't remember exactly how it was told to me but I came back home and I was called and told that I had the job.

[DH]: But what did your parents say about this?

[LT]: They all, they thought it was wonderful. My mother thought it was great. Because then retail was just a big thing for an African American, so they thought that was really... I would never do it again, and after NuMode closed in '71 I thought... well, I thought it was good in a way because it

made me realize I could do something else and not just be stuck in retail all my life.

0:25:11 [DH]: Retail is tough. Did you work a lot of hours?

[LT]: And I did, and I was so... I envied my friends because they had jobs where they had Saturday's off.

[DH]: Never had Saturday's off.

[LT]: And every now and then I would but I used to have to work. Now we weren't open on Sundays in those days, but... I had to work a lot of Saturdays and that's why when the store closed I was really kind of glad. I'm gonna get a job where I could have my Saturday's off like everybody else.

[DH]: Wow.

[LT]: So.

[DH]: That's something...

[LT]: If the store had not closed I don't know what I would have done... if I would have stayed there or if I would have eventually left. I hope that I would have eventually left. I hope.

0:25:57 [DH]: When your friends, you and your friends went downtown, you never experienced any problems with theaters or...

[LT]: I never did.

[DH]: Never.

[LT]: I never had to sit anywhere special because... we walked in we paid our money and enjoyed a movie like anybody else.

[DH]: Do you remember stopping and get ice cream at the Philadelphia?

[LT]: Only to carry out because again you didn't have the funds to do a lot of eating at restaurants. And Philadelphia was, I think, it was a little more expensive than some so we would get their carry-out ice cream because it was hand packed.

[DH]: Okay.

[LT]: And it was very good so. Every now and then I'd get ice cream there but as far as experiencing any problem, I didn't because I didn't go there that often.

0:26:40 [DH]: Do you... are there any city administration mayors that you remember being... that you liked better than others?

[LT]: Oh, my goodness.

[DH]: I guess what I'm asking, were you aware that the city, some of the policies of the city like open housing and fair employment practices, those were very hot issues in the late '50s and early '60s.

[LT]: And yes... and they were and...

[DH]: William Morris was one of the strongest advocates...

[LT]: Civil rights.

[DH]: For rights in town.

[LT]: Yes, he was because he was a relator and all that. Right. And people did have problems I guess living in certain... I shouldn't say I guess, I know. Living in certain parts of town. I've... we never had that problem because I was mostly raised on the west side.

[DH]: And that's where you stayed.

[LT]: And that's where I stayed. Different. You know... I was just there. I didn't have many problems and there's mostly... most African Americans were on the west side of town.

0:27:47 [DH]: Now in '67 there were some disturbances here and town and where you were living was right in the middle of it.

[LT]: Now that's... that's true. Down there on Washington/Walnut area, yeah, but I... I never was into it, but it was there.

[DH]: I was talking with Mr. Keith Bingham.

[LT]: Keith Bingham...

[DH]: He lived on Elmer Street...

[LT]: Okay.

[DH]: ...homes that were built up there in the 1950s. He was talking about his experiences that night. Did you stay in that night?

[LT]: Oh definitely. Because I'm thinking, was I still living on Walnut then? I had to be. But I definitely was in. Very definitely.

0:28:34 [DH]: Do you remember the shooting of Melvin Phillips over at the LaSalle Park Community Center?

[LT]: Melvin Phillips?

[DH]: Paul Harvey was there. A gentleman got his leg shot and he had it amputated.

[LT]: Just can't remember the name...

[DH]: Okay.

[LT]: Because there was another young man. I can't remember if it was a civil rights demonstration or what... that was injured but I don't remember why. And I don't know him his name just sticks with me. His name was Houston Sanders, but I don't know why I think he got shot. And he ended up in a wheelchair, but I don't know what it was an assault of. I just can't remember.

[DH]: Okay.

[LT]: Right off hand. You know there was a lot of unrest. There was a lot of unrest. In the '60s

0:29:32 [DH]: Beck's Lake. Did you ever spend some time out there?

[LT]: Not too much. Just lived out there for a while until the one got married. We lived on Wellington Street.

[DH]: Okay.

[LT]: For several years, and I would go out there and visit them because being the youngest I thought I get to visit them that was a big thing. But I enjoyed it when I'd go out there and they liked it the years they lived there.

[DH]: When they were living out there in the '60s, 'course it was a lot different than in the '40s and '50s.

[LT]: I'm sure.

0:30:05 [DH]: Did you ever joint the NAACP?

[LT]: No, I didn't, and I should have. So, I can't say I'm proud of that. I should have.

[DH]: Did you ever work with Dr. Chamblee?

[LT]: No, I didn't.

[DH]: With any of his projects?

[LT]: No, I didn't.

[DH]: Okay.

[LT]: I'm not a big joiner of organizations and things like that, so I never got into a lot of things.

0:30:33 [DH]: Okay. So is there any question you think I missed... You've experienced South Bend for quite some time and it's been... Everybody's experience is different.

[LT]: That's true and someone else may come along and tell a totally different situation than mine.

[DH]: Well, I'm trying to understand. You're pretty much unscathed by any racial prejudice. It just didn't happen to you.

[LT]: That's true.

[DH]: And...

[LT]: I have a friend who lives in... I can't remember where she lived now. But we went to Linden School and Central together, and a few years ago

we talked about that and she said, "I don't remember having a lot of these problems." And I said, "I didn't either."

[DH]: Was it just your attitude? You didn't anticipate having any problem and therefore you didn't have any problem?

[LT]: I don't know. That could be. I just don't know. But her name's Peggy White at the time and we talked about that and we said we never went through all of this. We could go and eat where we wanted to eat and we shopped where we wanted to shop.

[DH]: Never a problem.

[LT]: I didn't have any problems.

0:31:49 [DH]: Okay. Do you think South Bend's better now than it was or are we slipping backwards? What do you see from your viewpoint?

[LT]: Are you talking about from, like, a civil rights standpoint or...

[DH]: Just from where... You grew up in South Bend. You lived through that era, and now it's 2004.

[LT]: Even though there was a lot... okay, say the unrest of the west side at the time of the '60s. Yeah, that happened, but I think if I had my choice of living then and living now I would live then because I felt I could go anywhere. I could walk the streets... were safer to me.

[DH]: Well, they were safer.

[LT]: And now they're just so much violence all over. And I would not want to be a high school student right now. I definitely would not.

[DH]: I can understand that.

[LT]: So, I guess there is good and bad. But I would not want to be a child right now.

0:33:04 [DH]: What do you...do you think opportunities for African Americans are better today than they were when you were growing up? Or are they different?

[LT]: I guess now that I look at it I think... Employment, I think, might be better now. I can get a job just about anywhere, and people are going to accept you. If you're an African American in a retail establishment and you wait on somebody that's fine. But there were times when I would wait on... go to approach a person back in the NuMode days and they would ask for someone else. And it didn't hurt me. I would just tell them fine, and they might to wait a long time before someone could wait on them but that was their problem.

[DH]: Okay.

[LT]: Not mine.

[DH]: So, you had no feeling of sadness or...

[LT]: Nope. As long as they didn't talk down to me or degrading or anything like that because I could get hot tempered but I never... if they said, "We would rather have someone else wait on us." Fine. I'd go to the next person.

[DH]: Okay. So, you never had any problems with just basically people? They just say I'll wait for someone else.

[LT]: Right.

[DH]: And you'd move on to the next customer.

[LT]: Right. And then I remember one time there was a problem. Someone had a complaint about something. And so, she asked the salesperson may I see your manager. I was in the back doing something and I came out, and they said they wanted to see the manager. And I said yes, and they were like, oh. They were astounded. You're the manager? And they turned their nose or whatever, but it's up to them if they wanted to pursue their complaint or do otherwise. So there were little things but nothing really earth-shattering.

0:34:56 [DH]: You never had any problems with the police or city administration? Anything like that?

[LT]: No. Basically I stayed out of trouble.

[DH]: It sounds like you lived an exemplary life.

[LT]: No. Not a perfect life. No, no, no, no, no. But I just... I guess I never got in trouble. Coming up as a teenager I knew better than to get into any trouble. I would have got smacked, so I knew that, and I guess it stuck. So.

0:35:31 [DH]: Okay. Is there anything you want to say? Any question you think I should have asked but I didn't?

[LT]: Oh, I'll think of a million things later.

[DH]: Any comment you want to make. We were talking about downtown and you never owned... actually owned a home always rented. And never had any problems there. Your downtown experience was really...

[LT]: Until I moved where I am now, I always had African American landlords. So, now I live at Central High School.

[DH]: Oh!

[LT]: Yes, I've been there since March.

[DH]: You went back home.

[LT]: But to... back home. Someone else told me the same thing. I went back home.

0:36:14 [DH]: What's it like going back to the place you went to high school?

[LT]: I like it. It's wonderful. The house that I was living in, my landlord decided they wanted to sell it because of the big increase in property taxes. So, I thought, where am I going to go? And I thought I'm going to check out apartments. I called Robertson's. That was my first choice. But I didn't go there because they don't accept animals and I have a cat. So, then I thought, well, I'll call Central. Worked out.

[DH]: Great. Drive by it all the time. Wondered what were the apartments like?

[LT]: Oh, they're very nice. I have a two bedroom and...

[DH]: Does it look like the high school? Can you still see remnants of the high school...

[LT]: Oh sure.

[DH]: Or has it changed so much that...

[LT]: I tell everybody that I don't have an apartment number I have a room number. I think about the old room numbers. I'm around the corner from the chemistry room and the typing room. They still have the signs up there. Typing and chemistry. So, I'm around the corner from that. The big hallways... And of course, the rooms... the ceilings are just still very tall so. You can see some signs. And my apartment has a foyer that has one of the original book cases. Some of them have that. And so when she took my back I was like oh great. I can store stuff in and whatever, so. It's very nice. I like it.

[DH]: How interesting.

[LT]: Centrally located.

0:37:42 [DH]: You can't be much more centrally located than Central High School. You're close to everything.

[LT]: Just about. I miss Osco's downtown but... but it's nice. Everybody asks, "How do you like it?" I say I totally enjoy it.

[DH]: Yes, downtown has changed...

[LT]: I've been there since March.

[DH]: Downtown has changed so much in South Bend.

[LT]: And I miss... I wish we had a really good downtown. I've always been a downtown person.

[DH]: There aren't any stores at all downtown anymore.

[LT]: There is some and they're trying... they're trying to do better. They've got that downtown South Bend group or whatever and they're trying. I'm like... I don't like shopping centers and malls and stuff like that.

0:38:23 [DH]: Well, if you don't have anything else...

[LT]: I can't think of anything.

[DH]: ...to add, but it's been very.

[LT]: I hope it's ok because I know my views are quite different from others.

[DH]: Well that's what we need to do. We need everybody's views.

[LT]: I didn't get to read everything, but particular I read the comments from Barbara Brandy, and what she went through, you know. I was just fortunate.

[DH]: She came along...

[LT]: She was a little before my time. Ahead of me, '51.

[DH]: Maybe things changed that rapidly.

[LT]: That could be.

[DH]: I don't know. Okay, well, thank you very much. You've been very enjoyable.

[LT]: Well, I hope...

[Audio ends]